

OPERATIONS CENTER/CURRENT SUPPORT GROUP

News Bulletin

22 November 1982
Item #4

Item from NEWSWEEK, dated Nov 29, page 57.

INTERNATIONAL

CENTRAL AMERICA

An End to the Covert War?

Nicaragua's Sandinista regime is beginning to learn that winning a revolution can be a lot easier than staying in power. Some Sandinistas are not happy with the caliber of military and economic support they have received from the Russians. NEWSWEEK has learned that the Soviets, who have been tightening up credit on their military sales in the Third World, told the Sandinistas early this fall that they would not be getting any Soviet MiG fighters. The Sandinistas announced that decision last week, claiming that they themselves had decided not to buy the jets. But in fact some Nicaraguans were bitterly disappointed. "The Russians treat us like Indians," complained one former Sandinista official. "They give us a few mirrors and trinkets."

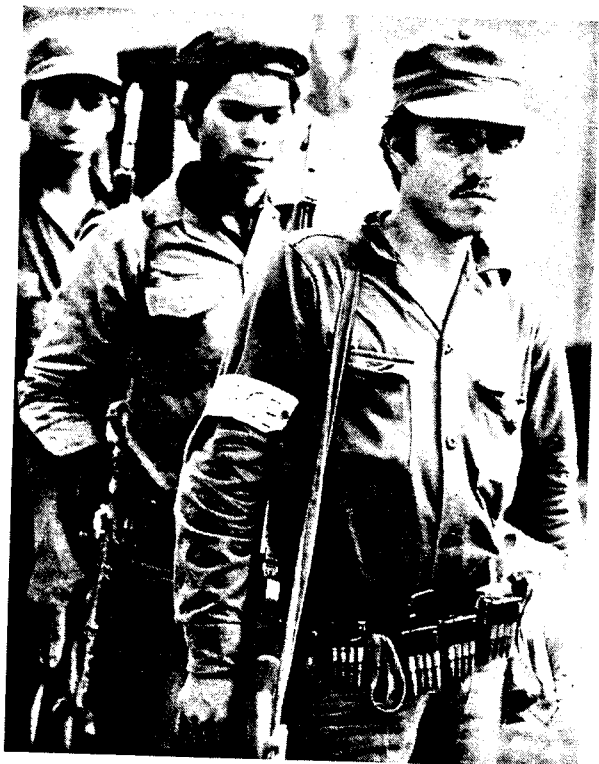
It was not entirely clear why the Russians stepped back on the MiG deal. But NEWSWEEK learned that U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz warned Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko seven weeks ago that the delivery of the jet fighters to Nicaragua would create serious problems between the United States and the Sandinistas—and between Washington and Moscow. After the Soviet action, U.S. and Nicaraguan sources say, some Sandinistas began to reassess their position, casting about for ways to mend fences with their neighbors. They might even be willing, at least temporarily, to cut aid to guerrillas in El Salvador. Sandinista leader Bayardo Arce once called the El Salvador rebels his "last card." "He will be willing to play it if he has to," said one former Sandinista official. "He is a man who ought to be nervous right now."

Second Thoughts: Pressure has also been building on both Honduras and the United States to adjust their joint operations in the region. In Washington, administration officials conceded that disclosures of Honduran involvement in CIA efforts to topple the Sandinistas (NEWSWEEK, Nov. 8) have forced Honduran leaders to have second thoughts. "Being called a tool of the CIA is not a good way to stay in power in Latin America, especially when the charges are true," said one U.S. official. "The Hondurans have got to do something to demonstrate their independence." Last week the government of Honduran President Roberto Suazo Córdova did just that, issuing a

four-part statement that reaffirmed Honduran neutrality, denied rumors of impending war with Nicaragua and vowed to crack down on anti-Sandinista exiles attacking Nicaragua from bases in Honduras.

On the Honduran border there were signs that anti-Sandinista guerrillas had sharply reduced their operations. Western diplomats said that a number of right-wing guerrilla camps had been abandoned or relocated in recent weeks. Honduran Foreign Minister Edgardo Paz Barnica met with Sandinista junta leader Daniel Orte-

(over)



John Hoagland—Gamma-Liaison

Sandinista border guards: Some 'mirrors and trinkets'

ga, who offered to discuss easing border tensions. Honduras and Nicaragua also signed a joint agreement to limit arms traffic and said top Army and Navy commanders would meet soon to discuss ways to improve relations.

It remained to be seen whether the changes were merely tactical. "The key question is how far, in the light of press revelations and the replacement of Haig by Shultz, U.S. policy here has been modified," said one political scientist in Honduras. There were rumors that armed-forces chief Gen. Gustavo Alvarez, a leading hard-liner, was lobbying for a "government of national unity," in which he would be able to outflank President Suazo. "There is still a struggle going on within the country," said one U.S. official. "The military is still not com-

pletely happy with civilian government." Ronald Reagan will soon have a chance to judge conditions in Honduras for himself. The White House announced that Reagan will end his upcoming trip to Latin America by visiting Tegucigalpa, where he will meet Honduran leaders, as well as President Efraín Ríos Montt of Guatemala. Following disclosures of U.S. covert activity, the visit could also help shore up the position of U.S. Ambassador John Negroponte. Secretary of State Shultz paved the way for the presidential trip with a speech to the Organization of American States, offering to join with Central American states in "practical mutual undertakings to end any and all support for violent activity on the territory of others." Any effort to use words instead of bullets in Central America would be a dramatic—and welcome—break with the past.

JAMES LeMOYNE with JOHN WALCOTT
in Washington and bureau reports